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Food stamp hearings to be held

During October, USDA will hold a nationwide series of hearings to get public comment on the Food Stamp Program. New legislation will make significant changes in the program, and USDA will be writing the regulations that will implement these changes. In announcing the hearings on September 1, Assistant Secretary Carol Tucker Foreman explained that USDA will have a "tremendous job" to do in writing these regulations. "We want to make sure the new rules ensure both effective service to those in need, and sound administrative operation," she said.

Many major provisions of the new program will be spelled out in detail in the legislation and can be changed only by Congress. However, there are other provisions which will give USDA some flexibility, and it is in these areas

USDA will be seeking suggestions. "Issues such as program accessibility are those on which the Department can best use comments from the public," Ms. Foreman emphasized. "We will be looking for suggestions as to how this new program can be made to operate more efficiently and effectively," she said. "And we especially want ideas on how to make the program more accessible to participants."

Ms. Foreman said the Department also would need suggestions as to how to design a number of test food stamp projects. The legislation will authorize several experimental projects, including a program to require food stamp participants to take public service jobs in exchange for their food stamps, and a program that would give cash instead of food

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Meal patterns proposed

The public is invited to comment on proposed new meal patterns for the National School Lunch Program. Secretary Bergland announced the proposals on September 6, explaining that they are the most significant changes in meal patterns since the program's inception in 1946.

"These proposed regulations represent a major step in our efforts to help schools more adequately meet the nutritional needs of children and to reduce plate waste," Mr. Bergland said. "We want to offer our students meals that are the most appealing

and the most acceptable to them within a sound nutritional framework, and we intend to operate the school lunch program as efficiently as possible."

The proposed patterns update the longstanding Type A meal pattern. They are designed to provide children with approximately one-third the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) for nutrients (except calories).

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stamps to certain elderly households. USDA is also interested in comments on a provision that would make free foods again available to needy Indians on reservations. Under the previous law, Indian reservations were being switched from the free food program to food stamps.

The USDA hearings are intended to seek comment on these provisions from people in both urban and rural areas. Urban hearings are scheduled for the following seven major cities: Boston, October 4; Los Angeles and Atlanta, October 11; Denver and Chicago, October 13; Dallas and Baltimore, October 18. The hearings will be continued a second day in each city if public demand warrants. The Department will make a special effort to seek comment from people in rural areas by holding additional hearings in smaller towns. Dates and locations for the rural hearings will be announced shortly. A special hearing on the problems of migrant farmworkers will be held October 13 in Fresno, California.

USDA is especially interested in hearing directly from food stamp participants, as well as from State and local program administrators, advocacy groups, other organizations, and the general public.

Anyone interested in testifying at the hearings or submitting a written statement should contact the nearest regional office of the Food and Nutrition Service.

The October issue of FOOD AND NUTRITION magazine will include a complete run-down on the new food stamp legislation, signed into law by President Carter on September 29.

Meal patterns, continued

The proposed lunch patterns define minimum portions of food for children of five age groups. The proposed patterns would reduce the amounts of food served to younger children among whom studies have found plate waste to be the greatest. At the same time, they would offer more food to older students with increased appetites and nutritional needs. However, older students--age 12 and up--would be able to choose smaller portion sizes of the required lunch components, if they wish.

The lunch requirements are based on the 1974 revisions of the RDA published by the National Academy of Sciences. This brings the lunch patterns up to date with new knowledge about nutritional needs, and with changing food preferences and eating habits of children.

Several changes

The proposed patterns would:

- Expand the bread alternatives to include the use of enriched or whole-grain rice and macaroni, and noodle products. This avoids situations in which both bread and chop suey over rice must be served at the same meal. It also allows flexible menu planning to meet ethnic and cultural food habits.

- Require lunch to be served to 1- through 5-year-old children at two sittings which together meet lunch pattern requirements. Department officials expect this to better meet the food consumption habits of young children.

- Require schools to offer students unflavored fluid low-fat, skim or buttermilk in addition to whole or flavored milk. This

would keep the amount of fat in the lunch at a moderate level.

- Require schools to involve students in their school food service program through activities such as menu planning, enhancement of the eating environment, program promotion and related student-community activities.

Comments invited

USDA welcomes comments on these proposed regulations from all interested parties, including students, parents, faculty, and community members. Comments are due by October 25, 1977.

After the initial comment period, USDA will issue interim regulations, which will be tested on a pilot basis from January 1978 through April 1978. The Department will continue to accept and consider public comments on the meal patterns during this period. USDA will hold public hearings this fall on all child nutrition programs, and the hearings will be another opportunity for the public to comment on the new meal patterns.

"There are a number of areas of concern in the school lunch program where the Department believes extensive public discussion is needed before final regulations are promulgated," Secretary Bergland said. "We have identified several matters on which we are especially anxious to have comments from the public before making a decision."

Among the areas identified are:

- How to determine the appropriate meal pattern in schools with mixed age groups.

- Whether to require that second helpings be made available and how to administer reimbursements for such helpings.

- How to provide the lunch pattern in two separate meal servings to the youngest group.

Mr. Bergland noted that the Department is also continuing to study alternatives to the Type A lunch pattern. One is the "nutrient standard approach," in which menus are planned to meet a predetermined nutrient level instead of a food pattern of specific types and quantities of food. USDA is especially interested in comments on this issue.

The public is invited to comment on both the proposed lunch patterns and the nutrient standard approach. Written comments should be sent to William G. Boling, Manager, Child Nutrition Programs, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The proposals appeared in the Federal Register September 9.

Hearings on child nutrition

USDA will hold a series of public hearings on the child nutrition programs this fall. The hearings will consider, but not be limited to, public comment on: the proposed school lunch meal patterns; meal quality and plate waste; the school breakfast program; the summer food program; the child care food program; nutrition education; competitive foods; training and staffing needs; administrative work load; financial support and cost to participate; student, parent, and community participation; Federal, State, and local relationships.

The hearings will be held October 25 and 26 in Chicago and New York; October 27 and 28 in Denver and Boston; November 1 and 2 in San Francisco and Atlanta; November 3

and 4 in Seattle and Dallas. For more information, contact the nearest regional office of the Food and Nutrition Service.

WIC regulations go into effect

Final regulations for the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children went into effect September 26. In February, FNS had invited public comment on proposed WIC regulations, and the final regulations included a number of changes made in response to comments received.

One proposed regulation would have set a nationwide income standard for all WIC participants.

However, comments from health professionals and State and local WIC administrators convinced FNS to delete this provision from the regulations and to withhold establishment of a national income standard at this time.

Instead of a national standard, the final WIC regulations adopt the eligibility test previously required by the interim regulations. Applicants are eligible if they meet standards set by State or county health departments for free or reduced-price programs.

FNS adopted other changes suggested by comments, including a time limit for getting WIC foods to

More comments invited on WIC

FNS is now accepting public comment on three areas of concern in the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):

- The sugar content of cereals approved for use in the program. The Department is concerned about sugar's possible role in development of tooth decay, obesity, and other health problems. Regulations published in the Federal Register August 26 propose new guidelines for the sugar, iron, and vitamin content in cereals provided to WIC participants.

- A proposal to make the WIC program available to infants and children based solely on income criteria. At present, low-income infants and children must be de-

termined to be at nutritional risk based on medical tests or their dietary patterns. This has resulted in some low-income infants and children being declared ineligible for the program.

- Ways USDA can improve the delivery of WIC services to low-income persons in rural areas. States now have the option of using one of three systems--vouchers redeemable at food markets, direct distribution at the WIC clinic, or home delivery.

Comments should be sent to the Director, Special Supplemental Food Division (WIC), Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The deadline for comment is October 10.

approved applicants. Local agencies will have to approve or deny a WIC application within 20 days, and provide food to eligible people within 10 days of approval.

Other major provisions of the final regulations are largely unchanged from the proposed rules.

Advisory council works on report

The Advisory Council on Maternal, Infant, and Fetal Nutrition is now working on its first annual report on the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children. To be submitted to the President and Congress in October, the report will include recommendations formulated at the council's June 23-24 meeting in Denver. That meeting included a review of the food packages distributed through WIC and of the status of program regulations.

The latest on quality control

Over 95 percent of all households receiving food stamps satisfy all basic program eligibility requirements, according to the latest quality control report. The new error rate statistics, based on a sample of 44,508 active cases during the 6 months ending in December 1976, show that:

- 4.7 percent of participating households failed to meet the basic eligibility criteria.

These households received 4.4 percent of food stamp benefits distributed during this period.

- 7.4 percent of all benefits provided represented overpayments to eligible households, while 2 percent of the benefits provided represented underpayments to eligible households.

- 9.1 percent of the households whose applications were denied or who were terminated from the program were incorrectly denied or terminated.

The new findings reflect, for the first time, the inclusion of both welfare and nonwelfare households in USDA's error rates. Previously, the food stamp quality control programs surveyed only non-public assistance households, who comprise about half of the nationwide caseload.

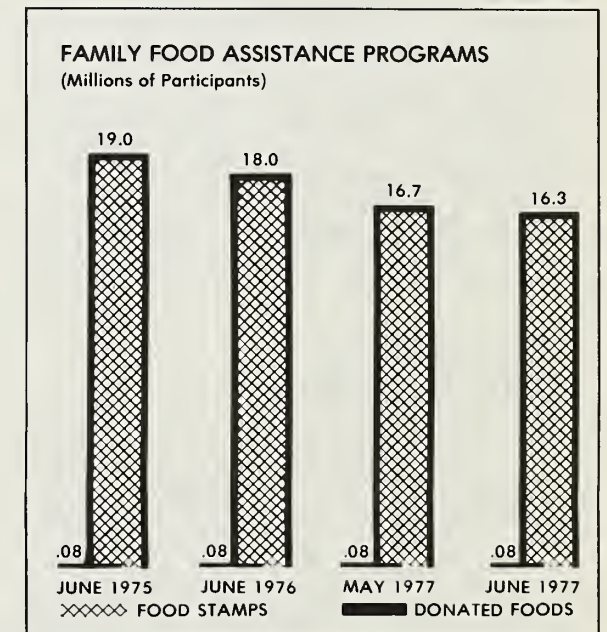
The new report also includes, for the first time, a State-by-State listing of the percentage of incorrect denials or terminations in each State. In previous years the report included State-by-State listings for ineligible rates, overpayments, and underpayments--but not incorrect denials or terminations. This change reflects the Department's determination to reduce errors of all kinds--errors that provide stamps to those who do not need them as well as errors that deny stamps to those who are in legitimate need.

New regulations set time limit

Amended food stamp regulations set a time limit for providing benefits to certified applicants.

Under the regulations, eligible households must receive authorization to purchase food stamps within a time limit that begins the day the State Welfare agency receives their application, and ends the last day of the following month. If a household does not receive authorization to purchase food stamps within the prescribed time limit, lost food stamp benefits must be restored. Lost benefits are calculated from the first day of the month which follows the month of application.

Although food stamp regulations require States to approve or deny a food stamp application within 30 days, until now, there has been no time limit on actually giving an eligible household the opportunity to purchase their



food stamp allotment. New legislation will eliminate the purchase requirement. However, participants will continue to pay for their food stamps until USDA issues regulations to put the new law into effect.

The regulations setting a time limit for providing benefits were published in the Federal Register July 26. The regulations also:

- Establish a procedure for restoring lost food stamp benefits to "zero purchase" households--households which get food stamps free because they have little or no income. Monthly stamp allotments for these households will be increased by up to 50 percent.

- State that a household can claim lost benefits if an incorrectly high purchase requirement prevents the household from obtaining all the food stamps to which it is entitled.

Food distribution officials meet

Over 140 State, USDA, and other Federal officials spent July 13-15 in Minneapolis discussing ways to make the Food Distribution Program more efficient and effective. The officials were attending the National Food Distribution Workshop, organized by Juan del Castillo, director of the Food Distribution Program.

Workshop participants included representatives from food distri-

bution agencies of the States and outlying areas, HEW, State departments on aging, FNS, and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. FNS Administrator Lew Straus addressed the participants at the final session, stressing the importance of the work the food distribution people are doing, and encouraging them to make the system as responsive as possible to the public's needs.

Emergency aid for flood victims

USDA-donated foods and emergency food stamp assistance aided victims of the floods that struck Western Pennsylvania July 21. Within the first 2 weeks after the flooding began, USDA and State and local officials had distributed an estimated 300,000 pounds of USDA foods to help feed people housed in emergency shelters. Those shelters were feeding as many as 45,000 people.

During the same period, more than \$2.5 million in emergency food stamps were distributed to over 63,000 people in the six flood-stricken counties. Emergency food stamp procedures allow flood victims to apply for emergency food stamps through a shortened application process in which they declare their need for food stamp assistance.

New warranties for food processors

Food processors must comply with a new set of warranties when bidding on purchase contracts for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. The new warranties are designed to ensure that only those firms which maintain high standards of production, plant sanitation, and which com-

ply with Federal food inspection and grading regulations will be awarded purchase contracts. Accordingly, prospective bidders seeking contracts to supply meat, poultry, egg, fruit, vegetable, and other food products must certify that they will:

- Operate sanitary facilities in compliance with USDA and/or FDA regulations.

- Provide government employees with a working environment in the plant free of harassment, threats, intimidation, and verbal or physical abuse.

- Adhere to facility, equipment, and maintenance upgrading schedules and agreements prescribed under the meat, poultry, and egg products inspection programs of the Food Safety and Quality Service.

Beginning July 1, 1978, USDA will examine the past performance of all prospective bidders against specific standards to decide whether a firm will be permitted to bid on food purchase contracts.

USDA makes labels more informative

This fall, USDA is taking a first step toward providing more complete ingredient labeling on foods it buys for use in schools and other feeding programs.

Frozen cooked turkey rolls--the first product to carry the new ingredient labeling--will have container labels that give not only the presently required list

of ingredients, but also the maximum or minimum percentage of each ingredient in the product, and if the ingredient is an additive, its purpose.

"This is a significant change in the ingredient labeling of processed foods which the Department purchases," Assistant Secretary Foreman said. "We hope that commercial processors and distributors will take a close look at what we're doing and undertake similar improvements in labels for the consumer market."

Questions raised on breakfast products

USDA has proposed to withdraw authorization for the use of "formulated grain-fruit products" in the School Breakfast Program.

The products were authorized in 1974 because at that time they were believed to provide a nutritious, convenient alternative to the conventional breakfast pattern, when served with milk. The products include doughnuts, cream-filled cakes, a coffee cake, oatmeal bar, and peanut butter crackers. Currently, there are controversies over the sugar and fat content of the products, their actual convenience, and their value in teaching good eating habits to children. These controversies led USDA to question

the justification for using the products in the breakfast program.

New child care regs give centers more time

New regulations allow child care centers to remain in the Child Care Food Program while awaiting a ruling on an application for tax-exempt status.

In the past, child care centers and family and group day care homes had to have, or be moving towards, tax-exempt status to qualify for the Child Care Food Program. However, some institutions were not able to obtain tax-exempt status within the set 12-month period, so USDA temporarily lifted the 12-month restriction, effective July 27. The Department will propose regulations which set a new time limit.

Federal payments increase 4.9 percent

Federal payments for meals served in the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Child Care Food Programs are 4.9 percent higher than last year. Provided to schools and institutions through State agencies, the payments help defray meal preparation costs.

The new rates, effective July 1, reflect the 4.9 percent increase in the Consumer Price Index for the 6-month period, November 1976 to May 1977.

In the National School Lunch Program, the average payment to States for each lunch served increased from 13.25 cents to 14 cents. States may now vary a school's reimbursement up to 20 cents a lunch. Previously, the ceiling was 19.25 cents.

The additional average payment to States for lunches served to needy children went up 3 cents--to 53 cents for a reduced-price lunch and 63 cents for a free lunch. The maximum reimbursement States may pay schools and institutions is now 82 cents for a reduced-price lunch and 92 cents for each free lunch.

In the School Breakfast Program, the national average payment increased from 10.75 cents to 11.25 cents. The additional average payment for each reduced-price breakfast, which had been 20 cents, increased to 21 cents. The additional average payment for a free breakfast increased from 26.75 to 28 cents. Maximum rates of reimbursement States may pay schools and institutions remain at 40 cents for each reduced-price breakfast and 45 cents for each free breakfast.

In the Child Care Food Program, States earn payments at the same levels as they do in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Payments for each mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack allowed under the Child Care Food Program increased from 5.50 cents to 5.75 cents. The additional average payments for reduced-price snacks increased from 11 cents to 11.50 cents, and for free snacks, from 16.50 cents to 17.25 cents.

In lieu of maintaining records on the actual cost of food used, sponsors of family and group day care homes in the Child Care Food Program may use a cost factor of 44.25 cents for each lunch or supper, 24.75 cents for each breakfast, and 15 cents for each supplement served. These factors

are also adjusted semi-annually to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index.

States to receive shortfall payments

USDA will be making cash payments to States to make up for a shortfall in commodity donations for school lunches. The National School Lunch Act directs USDA to provide schools with a specified value of donated commodities for each lunch served. If schools do not receive all the commodities programmed for them, they get cash payments to make up the difference. For fiscal year 1977, this difference amounted to approximately 3/4 of a cent per lunch. Accordingly, FNS is making payments totalling \$34,848,000 for the 4.7 billion lunches being served.

Income eligibility standards go up

Income poverty guidelines for the 1977-1978 school year are approximately 6.78 percent higher than last year's guidelines. Adjusted annually by USDA, the income poverty guidelines are the basis for determining eligibility for free and reduced-price meals and free milk served in the child nutrition programs. The guidelines apply to: schools and institutions participating in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, the Child Care Food Program, and the Special Milk Program; and to schools and institutions receiving federally donated foods.

Effective from July 1, 1977 to June 30, 1978, the new guidelines reflect the 6.78 percent increase in the Consumer Price Index during the 12-month period, April 1976 to April 1977. The new income eligibility level for a family of four is \$6090.

Based on the national income poverty guidelines, each State issues guidelines which schools and institutions use for determining if children are eligible for free and reduced-price meals or free milk. States are required to set the eligibility level of reduced-price meals at 95 percent above the national guidelines. In establishing eligibility standards for free meals and milk, States have the option of placing the cut-off level at up to 25 percent above the national poverty guidelines. The income poverty guidelines are higher for Alaska, Hawaii, and Guam due to higher living costs.

Income poverty guidelines take into account both family size and income before deductions for income taxes, insurance premiums, bonds, etc. In using the guidelines, schools and institutions may consider both the family's income during the past 12 months and the family's current rate of income to determine which is the better indicator of the need for free and reduced-price meals and free milk. When judging a family's income level, local administrators can also allow for specified hardship situations.

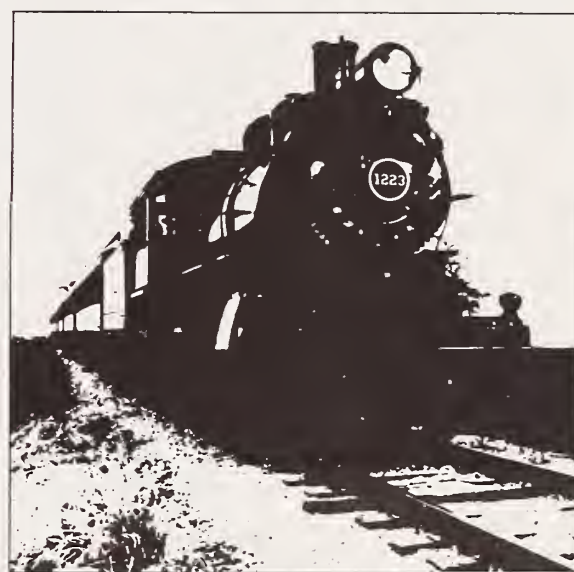
Students and parents attend council meeting

Two high school students and two parents took part in the recent meeting of the National Advisory Council on Child Nutrition, held in Washington August 22-23. The council had invited the parents and students to participate in the entire 2-day session and to offer their views on how the child nutrition programs are operated and how they may be improved. During the meeting, council members reviewed proposed legisla-

tion, discussed program evaluation to prepare recommendations for further legislation, reviewed nutrition education plans for 1978, and received updates on surveys and studies.

"Power on a Plate"--the new lunch spot

"POWER ON A PLATE" is the theme of this year's school lunch television spot. The 30-second spot is produced annually by FNS and the American School Food Service Association in support of National School Lunch Week. This year's spot shows that as locomotives need fuel for power, children need nutritious lunches for energy to learn and play. The spot will be shown throughout the country during National School Lunch Week, October 9-15.



People

● Christine Van Lenten and Patricia W. Deitz are special assistants to FNS Administrator Straus. Both had previously worked with Mr. Straus in developing community food and nutrition programs in New Jersey.

Chris Van Lenten comes to FNS from New Jersey, where she worked for 4 years on the National Child Nutrition Project, headed by Lew Straus. Ms. Van Lenten helped develop the 1974 New Jersey food stamp campaign, a highly successful statewide effort that involved the cooperation of the mass media, major supermarkets, and community action agencies. She also planned and conducted food stamp training for advocacy groups, and helped develop community food and nutrition programs for community action agencies in New Jersey. From July

1975 through June of 1977, Ms. Van Lenten developed and coordinated NCNP's statewide food stamp campaigns in Minnesota, Indiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Prior to joining NCNP, Ms. Van Lenten was active in the women's movement in New Jersey and in State politics. She is a graduate of New York University. At FNS, she is Director of the Office of Legislative Affairs.

Pat Deitz is Confidential Assistant to the Administrator. Ms. Deitz began her association with Federal feeding programs in 1969 as a program development specialist for the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. She first worked with Lew Straus in 1970 in the State Department of Education, where she was responsible for structuring the budgetary, legislative, and administrative aspects of setting up school lunch programs in 10 New Jersey cities. In 1972, Ms. Deitz moved to Boston, and worked

as a supervising program analyst for the State's Executive Office of Human Services. She attended Boston University School of Law from 1974-75, and came to Washington in 1975 to continue her legal studies. Ms. Deitz worked as a student attorney with the Georgetown Criminal Justice Clinic, before joining the FNS staff.

A native of Buffalo, New York, Ms. Deitz graduated from Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, and received her Doctor of Laws degree from the Georgetown University Law Center in 1977.

● Herbert Rorex and Grant Tolley, both pioneers in food assistance programs, retired in July. Mr. Rorex directed the School Lunch Program for over 19 years, and was Special Assistant to the Administrator when he retired. Mr. Tolley, one of the original architects of the Food Stamp Program, was chief of the Food Stamp Program Development Branch when he retired.

New releases

● "Equipment Guide for On-Site School Kitchens" (PA-1091) updates information on planning new school food service facilities and on equipping existing ones.

● "Food Chart--Child Care Food Program (PA-1165) is a poster that lists the required amount of food, from each food group, to be served at every meal.

● "School Food Service Management Manual" (PA-1175) is a handbook designed for school food

service supervisors and managers who prepare meals on the school premises. It serves as a guide to help food service personnel establish and improve the child nutrition programs.

● "A Guide for Precosting Food for School Food Service" (PA-1185) is a booklet designed to help school food service managers control food costs as they plan their menus.

● "Quantity Recipes for Child Care Centers" (FNS-86) has been revised to eliminate butter as a requirement from the meal patterns. The cover of the card file of recipes was also revised.

Copies of these publications are available from the Child Nutri-

tion Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

● "The Food Stamp Program," (PA-1123) now has a single-page addendum which updates food stamp requirements on pages 4 and 11. It includes the 1977 "Household Income Standards," and the "Monthly Coupon Allotments and Purchase Requirements" chart, both effective July 1, 1977 through December 31, 1977.

Copies are available from the Food Stamp Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.